

## Christian Worldview Education in The Era of Disruption

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### Abstract

*Existential questions for human existence has always been very important for everyone to answer. The increasing number of disturbances as well as innovation in all areas in this disruptive era makes existential questions about life increasingly important for Christians. This interest moves the researchers to investigate a worldview education model that fits Christians today. Therefore, the research focuses on the formulation and education of Christian worldview that The Apostle Paul used in his letter to the Colossians. The study used Bruner's paradigmatic and narrative theory of thought to analyze the explanatory approach that Paul used in presenting his Christian worldview in his letter to the Colossians. This research also used the grammatical historical contextual interpretation method to study the logical development of Paul's argument, the situation behind each of Paul's statements and different subgenres that he used in the letter. Based on the interpretation the researchers then formulated the existential concept of Paul and the contextual approach he used to disseminate his Christian worldview to the saints in Colossae. The results of this study found that Paul used a combination of paradigmatic and narrative methods to explain his Christian worldview as a way to address the problem of syncretism that occurred in the Colossian church. Paul based his existential concept of human life in the grace of God which was powerfully pictured through the supremacy of the life and work of Jesus Christ. Paul explains that a Christian worldview can only be gained through faith in the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. The research found eight principles that Paul used as a model for Christian worldview education. They are: 1) The need to cultivate prayer life and prayer models that focus on God's grace and peace, 2) The need to formulate a Christian worldview that solely emerges and focus on the gospel of Christ, 3) Worldview dissemination can be done through the current technology available for the learner, 4) The declaration of the believers' true identity in Christ by grace as a paradigm, 5) Teaching Christian paradigms on Christ's supremacy can be done through song, poetry or prose, 6) The need to explain the relationship between God's grace and human's trust, 7) Embracing suffering as life facts by the power of Christ as the believers wait for the final glorification, and 8) Developing a counter explanation for philosophies that undermine Christ's grace and supremacy based on the true identity of the believers in Christ.*

*Keywords: Christian Worldview, Colossians, Era of Disruption.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world has been the battleground for worldview conflicts for thousands of years. Everyone on earth lives out his or her worldview everyday consciously or unconsciously and constantly interacts with others from different paradigms.

A worldview is a combination of beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, stereotypes, and ideas to construct complex conceptual frameworks that organize lived experience. Together these form a kind of scaffolding on which individuals can build a meaning system about their past, present, and future and live them out every day [1]. Worldview answers existential questions on human life, its origin, meaning, process, and destiny. Such set of understanding determines how someone sees and relates with God, other humans, other creatures in the universe, and a person's own identity, Worldview provides explanations for issues like suffering, sickness, death and the ultimate destination of human existence. [2] Because this philosophical system's coherence and comprehensiveness reside in someone's mind and define life values and strongly impacts decisions and behavior, it is really significant for a person to have a healthy and life-promoting worldview.

The Apostle Paul once had a Judaistic worldview that motivated him to harm Jewish Christian communities even to the level of murdering many followers of Jesus Christ. This portrays the serious consequences of a certain worldview. In this era of the internet of things when people might easily access and adopt new paradigms, worldview analysis and education are brought to their foremost important role. Existential issues such as racism, persecution, and terrorism in the name of religion, mental health and suicide, tolerance, and pluralism, are all issues that occur on account of conflicting worldviews and interests.

The Judeo-Christian faith is therefore challenged to present a coherent and comprehensive worldview that fosters peace and prosperity while maintaining its uniqueness amid the growing culture of syncretism and skepticism. The study on worldview dissemination techniques by the transformed Saul of Tarsus in his letter to the Colossians is, therefore, a good pattern for contemporary Christians in facing phenomena of conflicting or syncretizing worldviews. This research is conducted to analyze Paul's worldview education principles in the letter to saints in Colossae. This study can be used as a theoretical reference for Christian education that focuses on worldview analysis.

## II. METHODE

The research used Bruner's paradigmatic and narrative theory of thought to analyze the explanatory approach that Paul used in presenting his Christian worldview in his letter to the Colossians [3]. This research used the grammatico-historical contextual interpretation method to study the logical development of Paul's argument, the situation behind each of Paul's statements, and different subgenres that he used in the letter. Based on the interpretation the writer then formulated the existential concept of Paul and the contextual approach he uses to change the worldview of the saints in Colossae. Paul's Christian worldview and methods of worldview education would then be proposed as the approach for the present Christian worldview education.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Apostle Paul highly valued the Christian worldview as so essential for human life. He experienced living in a particular worldview that caused him to persecute Christians and took delight in it, thinking that it was righteous behavior to please God (cf. Gal. 1:13-14; 1Cor. 15:9; Acts 22:1-5; 1Tim. 1:12-13; Rom. 10:2-3). This life experience shows how dangerous a worldview might be for a person or a group of people. After his encounter with the resurrected Christ Paul's belief was transformed and he then proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ through which he also saw his life and the world in a new way. Licona, Craig, and Habermas have ruled out the possibility of Paul's experience as a hallucinatory one [4]. The event must be so tangible and so real for Paul that he became one of the first century preacher of forgiveness of sins in the name of the One whom he blasphemed and persecuted before. The extraordinary and immediate paradigm shift that brought him to be a peaceful and life-promoting person is seen in his writing to the Colossian congregation. When he was writing the letter he was a prisoner for the gospel, the message he once condemned as heresy (4:3, 10, 18). Pauline narrative and paradigmatic approach in the letter are going to be explained in this section.

#### 3.1 Pauline Narrative Approach

In the first century recipients considered letters as a representation of the personal presence of the writer. This can be seen from the fact that the Christian congregations of the first century accepted the apostles' letters as authoritative and living writings. They accepted these documents as not mere human writings but as authoritative words from the living God (3:16; 4:3, 16; cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Through this letter, the writer is considered to be telling a story and living. Dissemination of the Christian worldview occurs through the writing of the letter, reading the letter in front of local congregations and the congregation's reflection on the news announced. [5] Letters were the technology of long-distance conversations in that world.

Paul chose this technology to pass on his reproof, rebuke and instruction to the Colossians through Epaphras. A thorough reading of Paul's letter to the Colossian reveals how the apostle used the writing as an efficient way to teach essential Christian paradigms even though he was imprisoned (4:3, 10, 18; 1:25-29). The letter form used appears to be a mixture of personal correspondence and royal correspondence. [6] The letters can be divided into several parts: 1) Paul's story of his prayers and passion for the Colossian growth (1:1-14), 2) The Short Story of Christ's Supremacy (1:15-23), 3) Paul's story of suffering in proclaiming the gospel (1:24-2:4), 4) Paul's story of the Colossian struggle (2:5-4:6), and 5) Paul extends greetings from other believers who are also striving for the gospel (4:7-18). Through the letter, Paul can instruct, answer questions, reprove, encourage, and exhort. Through this letter, the apostolic authority of Paul became a reality for the Colossian community rooted in the soil of historical particularity, and in a secondary way, through their canonization, these letters constitute a similar authority for the church of every age. [7] In this section, Paul's narrative approach in the letter is going to be analyzed in light of Bruner's discourse properties of stories.

**The Sjuzet.** Paul begins the letter with greetings from him and Timothy. He claimed himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, the church's brother in Christ. Paul then expresses his continual gratefulness and prayer toward God for the conversion and cultivation of the Colossian church faith, hope, and love toward God and all the saints because of hearing the gospel of God's grace (1:9-14). After that, he explains the short version of the gospel that the Colossian has received. It is the story of creation and redemption

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by Christ's supremacy and cross (1:15-23). That gospel is the godly message that has transformed the lives of the Colossians.

Paul continues to portray his struggle and suffering for the gospel for the sake of the Gentiles including his special burden for the Colossians (1:24-2:3). He expresses his deepest concerns about the deceitful philosophies that attacked the church (2:4, 8, 11, 16, 18, 20, 23). He gives his reproof for the teachings of men through explaining how the true identity the church has in Christ is the only basis for growth in personal life, communal life, familial relationship, and even in professional work (3:1-4:6). He then invites them to remember and pray for him that he might still preach the gospel even though he is still in bondage (4:3). Finally, he also writes the greetings from other saints, the real proof that the gospel is indeed expanding (1:6, 26-27). There are at least three principles of worldview education that can be extracted from reading the plot. First, the need to cultivate prayer life and prayer models that focus on God's grace and peace. Secondly, the need to formulate a Christian worldview that solely emerges and focuses on the gospel of Christ. Thirdly, worldview dissemination can be done through the current technology available for the learner.

**Triggering of Presuppositions.** There are several important triggering presuppositions Paul utilizes in this letter. First, he begins the letter with a declaration of the Colossian status as saints and faithful brethren in Christ (ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ, 1:2). In this introduction, he also proclaims greetings of grace and peace. There are two important aspects in this first presuppositions. Paul is teaching them very early in the letter that their present status is saints and faithful brethren. This status is only acquired because they are now in Christ, not mentioning their efforts [8]. It means they only become saints and faithful people if they are already in Christ by faith and not on account of any single performance of righteousness on their part.

This is not merely human greetings but also a declaration from God that the church is in the place of grace and peace in Christ. This is the essence of the gospel that Paul preached and the Colossians believed. The believers are now in a place of favor and full of peace. This greeting is a consistent affirmation of their present status as saints and brethren in Christ. This greeting requires immediate faith on the part of the receiver.

The second presupposition Paul proposes is the Colossians' current spiritual growth. He learned this through Epaphras (1:8). He prays for them that they may continue to grow with the same principle as the moment when their life was first transformed, that is, by faith in the gospel of grace and not trusting their effort (1:3-8). Paul calls this as understanding the grace of God in truth (1:6). The believers are to understand that it is the grace of God that gives them forgiveness of sins and empowers them to grow continuously (cf. 1:29) [9]. Their growth starts right after they understand and receive God's grace. Paul explains that growth is the product of continual faith in God's gift of true identity in Christ and in God's gracious gift of daily wisdom and understanding (1:9-14).

Thirdly, Paul triggers them with the message of Christ's supremacy. This is the peak point of the letter. Paul uses a lot of Jewish imagery in this part. This is not an intolerant act of Paul toward the Gentiles. The apostle is simply using the language of the Scriptures to empathically show that Jesus is the long-promised Messiah of the Tanakh. Paul did not wish to lead attention to the preeminence of Christ per se, but he demonstrated this priority and supremacy to teach the Colossians that Christ is ever and always the solution to their fears and perplexities [10].

Behr has shown that in the chiasmic structure of 1:13-20, Christ as the head of the body, the church is the center of the pattern [11]. This crown point of the chiasm is a strong illustration that Paul uses to trigger the reader on the actuality of their unification now with Christ as his body on the ground of his crucified body as God and man on the cross. Through this term and other titles in 1:13-20 Paul shortly pictures the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures. By this Paul takes Christ as a historical figure whose death and resurrection have transformed his former worldview by the power of his grace. The writer is making this experience and argument as a pattern and part of the gospel's testimony which provides assurance of right living paradigms and practices for the recipients. He might probably write

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1:15-20 as a two-stanza Christian hymn or employs exalted and even rhythmic prose like what ancient speakers did when praising deities [12].

Paul's fourth presupposition is his current suffering. Paul defines it as what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (1:24). This statement is not a mockery of Christ's sacrificial work. Paul explains that his suffering and struggle are done according through Christ's power that powerfully works in him (1:29). It means it is Christ who saved him and who also empowers him to serve the church, even to the point of suffering for them. After finishing his perfect salvific work upon the cross Christ will no longer suffer physical persecution as a man. What the apostles do then is proclaiming that good news of the cross and Christ's resurrection. That is now what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, i.e., proclaiming his perfect sacrificial death on the cross as the only basis for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ in 1:24 is referring to Paul's Christ-empowered suffering in proclaiming the gospel.

Paul then gives his fifth trigger, the presence of deceitful teachings and practices in Colossae (2:4-23). Paul names those teachings and practices as captivating teachings of men that promote fleshly indulgence (2:8, 22-23). This thought is readily countered by the apostle by further application of Christ's supremacy prose and by asserting the ontological consequences of believing in their true identity in Christ alone (2:1-4:5). They are to continue to grow in victory over these issues because of their hope of the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to make heaven and earth anew (1:5, 20; 3:4). He follows up this concern with imperatives to pray for his evangelistic ministry as well as to wisely share their Christian life to the outsiders.

Paul's last presupposition is through extending greetings from other believers (4:7-18). The previous closing prayer invitation alongside the greetings from other saints is a reinforcement of the theme, "the gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world" (1:6). From these presuppositions several steps can be established as a model for educating new paradigms: 1) The declaration of the believers' true identity in Christ by grace, 2) Teaching Christian paradigms on Christ's supremacy through song, poetry or prose, 3) Explaining the relationship between God's grace and human's trust, 4) Embracing suffering as life facts by the power of Christ as the believers wait for the final glorification, and 5) Developing a counter explanation for philosophies that undermine Christ's grace and supremacy.

**Subjectification.** In this letter, Paul is inviting the whole reader in Colossae and Laodicea to see their life the way God sees theirs. The deceitful philosophies and practices of men are counted as rudiments of the world that will only succeed if only the Colossians trust them and not the identity that God has given them which Paul has written extensively in this letter. Paul uses some vertical axis to teach the Colossian believers their true identity in Christ: saints and faithful brethren (1:2, 4, 26; 4:9), a dear fellow slave and a faithful minister of Christ (1:7; 4:7, 12), have been qualified to share in the saints' inheritance in the light (1:12), delivered from the power of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Son (1:13), redeemed and forgiven (1:14; 3:13), the body of Christ (1:18, 24; 3:15), the church (1:18, 24; 4:15-16), reconciled (1:22), holy, without blemish, and blameless (1:22), servant of the church (1:23, 25), have received Christ Jesus as Lord (2:6), have been filled in Christ (2:10), having the flesh circumcised by Christ (2:11), having been buried with Christ in baptism, have been raised with Christ through faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. (2:12), made alive with Christ (2:13), freed from the rulers and authorities (2:15), no longer living in the world (2:20), have been raised with Christ, seated at the right hand of God (3:1), have died and are securely hidden with Christ in God (3:3), the elect of God, holy and dearly loved (3:12), fellow workers for the kingdom of God (4:11), beloved (*ὁ ἀγαπητός*, 4:14). Paul teaches believers to claim these things as the new normal for their lives. They are not to look at themselves at their old identity as strangers and enemies in their minds as expressed through their former evil deeds (1:21). They are no longer called the sons of disobedience (3:6).

The key to seeing growth is faith in Christ alone. Man is not required to add any single work of righteousness to Christ's finished work. The various vertical axes used for this principle are to ask God to work and fill someone with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual

wisdom and understanding (1:9), understanding Christ (2:2), faith in Christ (2:5), receiving Christ (2:6), to be rooted and built up in him (2:7, in the passive form which means the church is to believe and receive it from Christ as the source and controller of the growth), and faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead (2:12). Paul also describes faith as holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, supported and knit together through its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God (2:19), keep seeking the things above (3:1) and keep thinking about things above (3:2). These are equal concepts that speaks about trust in God's word and work and not on human teachings nor rituals. God is the only right object of human's faith and the believers are to put their whole trust and hope on God the creator of the new image (3:10). Therefore, works of righteousness in the believers' life are the product of the unification with Christ by faith and not means to produce righteousness. This worldview is different from the teachings of men and certain rituals which at their core do not depend solely on Christ's perfect work.

Paul makes it very clear in this letter that faith is the only means to access the grace that the gospel promises. He also avers Christ as the only accurate object of faith. He employs various titles of Jesus Christ to emphasize this point. Those titles are Lord and Christ (1:3, 4), the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (1:15), the head of the body (1:18), the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead (1:18), all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form in him (2:9), The Head (2:19), the believer's life (3:4), and the Master in heaven (4:1). Faith in Christ produces supernatural good works as evidence of Christ mightily works in the believers as in the life of Paul (1:29).

The non-Christian philosophers and worshippers in 2:8-23 must have missed Christ's supremacy over all things and in all things. They might have thought that their philosophy, circumcision, baptism, mystical understandings, and legalism can be a means through which they could attain forgiveness of sins or perfection. They differ with Paul in insisting that Christ alone who is to be preached and who can bring everyone to salvation and true spiritual maturity (1:12-14, 28). The subjectification of this epistle therefore establishes the principle that prosperous and powerful Christian life is the byproduct of faith in the gospel of Christ and the true identity of the believers presented in the gospel.

**Multiple perspectives.** In this letter, the observer can perceive how the gospel of Christ's supremacy and its expansion is to be seen in the life of the saints in Colossae and Laodicea. They are the ones who are currently growing spiritually in faith, love, and hope, despite the indication that there are some false teachings and enticing other spiritual practices around them. The growth of the gospel is also witnessed through the life and ministry of Paul, including his imprisonment. The center of the chiasm in 4:2-6 shows that Paul is emphasizing his imprisonment as a vivid picture of the seriousness of the growth. This assures the audience that Paul's current physical "binding" in chains by human beings is subsumed within his spiritual "binding" by God to be a minister of the gospel and of the church, a minister who is "bound" to proclaim that mystery to every human being (1:23-28). [13] Finally, the fact that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world is represented in the greetings from other fellow workers for the kingdom of God in the last part of the epistle.

**The Fabula.** Based on the analysis of the plot, triggering of presuppositions, subjectification and multiple perspectives, the timeless theme of Paul's epistle to the church in Colossae can be stated as "The Expanding Gospel of Christ's Supremacy".

### 3.2 Pauline Paradigmatic Approach

The paradigmatic approach employed in this epistle is evidenced by the words "if ... then" that Paul uses. He incorporates the logico-scientific method along with his story of praying for the Colossians continued spiritual growth, the short prose of Christ's supreme work of salvation, his own story of suffering as an apostle to the Gentiles, and in his correction for the false doctrines and worship that were in contact with the Colossian church during that time. In chapter 1 Paul uses the approach in verses 3-14 where he explains the reason for his

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rejoicing and the purpose of his prayer for the Colossian believers. Paul prays for continual growth because they have received the gospel of Christ. He also explains in 1:9-14 that the reason for his thanksgiving is the salvation that God the Father and Christ have done for the believers which is the legal basis for their continued growth. Paul there draws the direction of salvation as being saved from darkness and saved to enter the kingdom of The Beloved Son (1:12-14).

Paul also utilizes the technique in 1:15-23 in explaining Christ's superiority over all things and its practical implication for the saints' spiritual life. This concern for spiritual growth after receiving Christ is continued in 2:6-7 where Paul shows the ontological design of the life in Christ, that is, to continually live in Him and be equipped and empowered by Him. Paul proves that the ontological consequences of receiving Christ as Lord is not to live in sin but to be perfected by Christ (cf. 1:28-29).

The supremacy of Christ and the new identity in him is vindicated as the righteous basis for victory over false teachings. The rhetorical aim of this exalted portrayal was to strengthen the confidence of the Colossians in Christ's sufficiency as God's revelation, in his preeminence over the spirit world, and in his superiority over anything the false "philosophy" could offer, so that they would entrust themselves to him alone [14].

Paul provides practical implications for Christian living on the ground of what Christ has been and has done for the believers (2:8-4:6). He uses the formula of "you have been .. therefore", "Christ has ... therefore", or "if you ... in Christ ... therefore" (3:1-4). This is the paradigm that he offers for the saints to have and claim until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Interestingly the pattern never talks about doing good works to be saved. For Paul salvation always precedes the production of righteous acts in the life of the believers. He shows that godly conducts are the fruit of faith in the righteous identity in Christ. In this epistle, Paul lifts Christ to the highest as the source of the true life, nurturer of the new life, and the final goal of the redeemed life.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In light of Bruner's discourse properties of stories and the grammatico-historical contextual interpretation approach in analyzing The Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians it is found that the fabula, the timeless theme of the letter is "The Expanding Gospel of Christ's Supremacy". The growth of the expansion is seen in the growth and struggle of the saints in Colossae, in the suffering and imprisonment of Paul, as well as in the life of other fellow members of the body of Christ.

The research found eight principles that Paul used as a model for Christian worldview education. They are: 1) The need to cultivate prayer life and prayer models that focus on God's grace and peace, 2) The need to formulate a Christian worldview that solely emerges and focus on the gospel of Christ, 3) Worldview dissemination can be done through the current technology available for the learner, 4) The declaration of the believers' true identity in Christ by grace as a paradigm, 5) Teaching Christian paradigms on Christ's supremacy can be done through song, poetry or prose, 6) The need to explain the relationship between God's grace and human's trust, 7) Embracing suffering as life facts by the power of Christ as the believers wait for the final glorification, and 8) Developing a counter explanation for philosophies that undermine Christ's grace and supremacy based on the true identity of the believers in Christ. Paul also utilizes the paradigmatic or logico-scientific method all throughout the epistle as part of his complete arguments on explaining that prosperous and powerful Christian life is the byproduct of faith on the gospel and the true identity of the believers in Christ. The result echoes what Bruner once wrote: "In the end the narrative and the paradigmatic come to live side by side."

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